



steep

ed brubaker
sean phillips

#9
DEC



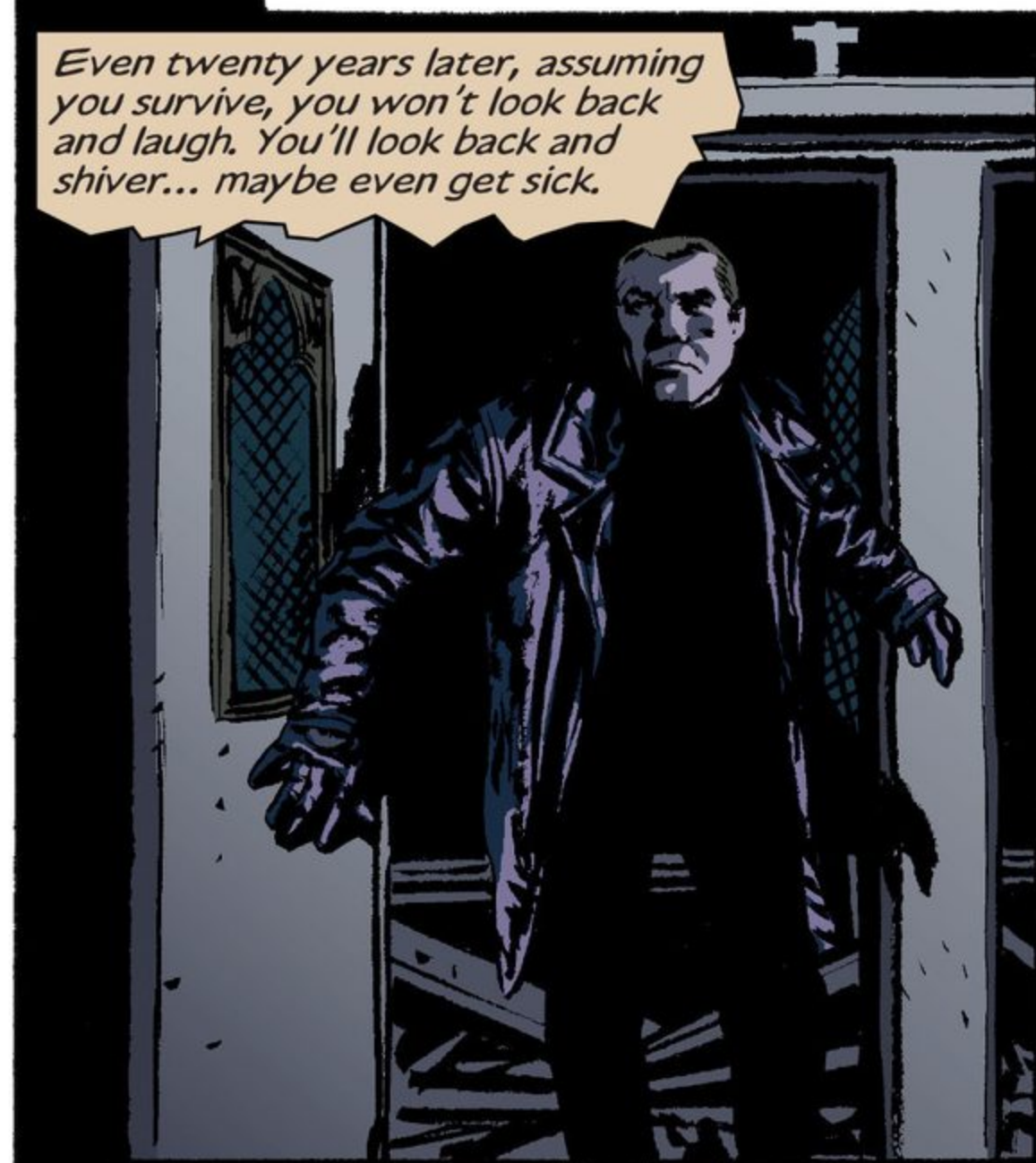
Sean
2003

*My life has become
Post-Ironic.*

*That's when there's so goddamn much
irony in everything that you do, that it
collapses on top of itself. It stops being
funny, even as a black comedy.*



*Even twenty years later, assuming
you survive, you won't look back
and laugh. You'll look back and
shiver... maybe even get sick.*



*Case in point--
my current mission.*



*A week ago I was
on my way out of
this whole life...*



*...And now I'm
working as hard as
I can just to keep
myself safe in it.*



And while I'm trying to save my own ass, who am I partnered with?



Peter Grimm. The one person I know for sure who'd like to watch me take a fall... Who'd like to be the one doing the pushing.

CARVER?
WHAT ARE
YOU DOING UP
HERE?

I THOUGHT
YOU WERE TAKING
THE **BOTTOM**
FLOOR?



IT'S **CLEAN**.
THIS PLACE IS A
BUST...UNLESS
YOU'RE HAVING
SOME LUCK?



NO.



SO, WHAT
DO YOU WANNA
DO?

NEXT PLACE
ON THE LIST, OR
DO WE CALL IT A
NIGHT?



THERE ARE
STILL **FOUR HOURS** UNTIL
SUNRISE, CARVER...WE WORK
WHILE WE HAVE THE
ADVANTAGE...





But being stuck with Peter Grimm isn't the only painful irony at work here.

No, that would be too simple, too average...and like I said, we're way beyond that...

For the Wicked

ED BRUBAKER
writer

SEAN PHILLIPS
artist

TONY AVIÑA colorist • ROB LEIGH letterer
KRISTY QUINN asst. editor • SCOTT DUNBIER editor

SLEEPER created by ED BRUBAKER & SEAN PHILLIPS

TWO DAYS EARLIER...

--UNFORTUNATELY, OUR AGENTS WERE **KILLED** BEFORE ANYTHING USEFUL COULD BE EXTRACTED FROM SIR MALCOLM.



WHEN PETER AND I ARRIVED, THE **ENTIRE BUILDING** WAS AN **INFERNO**. I WAS READY TO ASSUME THAT JONES HAD PERISHED IN THE BLAZE ALONG WITH MY MEN...



BUT HE HADN'T. HIS CHARRED CORPSE WAS RECOVERED FROM THE SCENE OF A CAR ACCIDENT A FEW MILES AWAY.

ANOTHER BODY WAS FOUND AT THAT SCENE, AS WELL. THIS ONE WAS A WITNESS, SHOT IN THE HEAD.



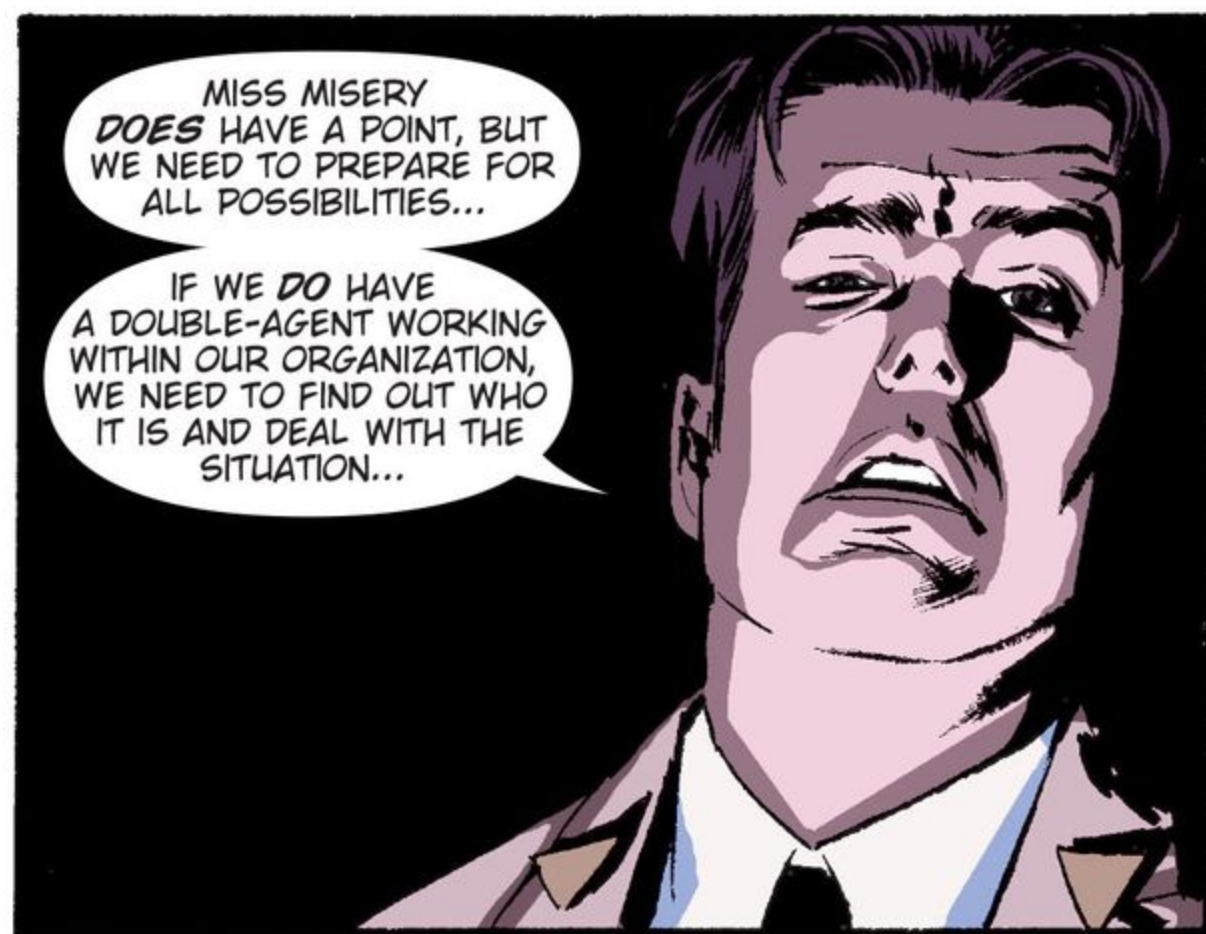
WHICH MEANS OUR **MOLE** IS STILL OUT THERE.

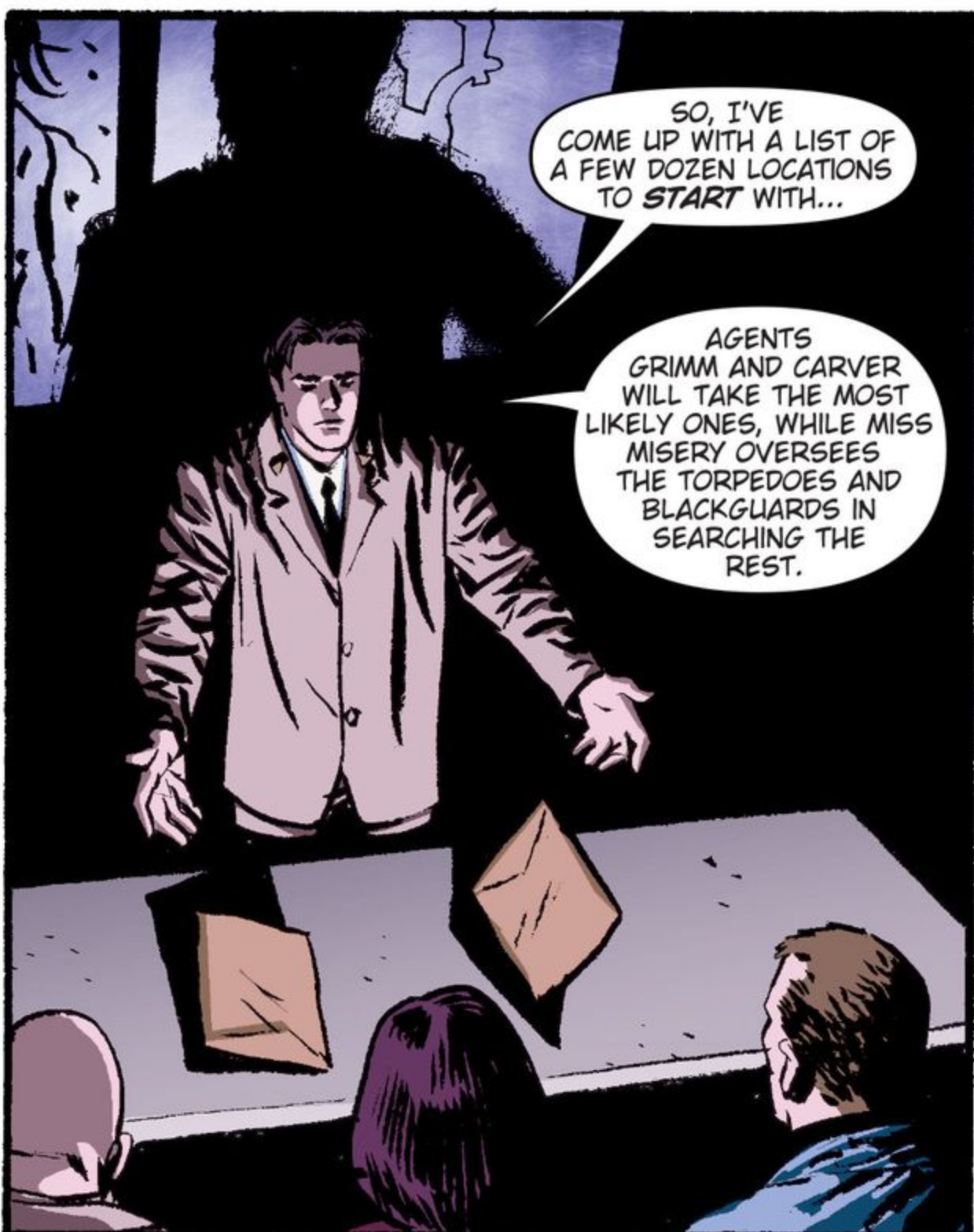
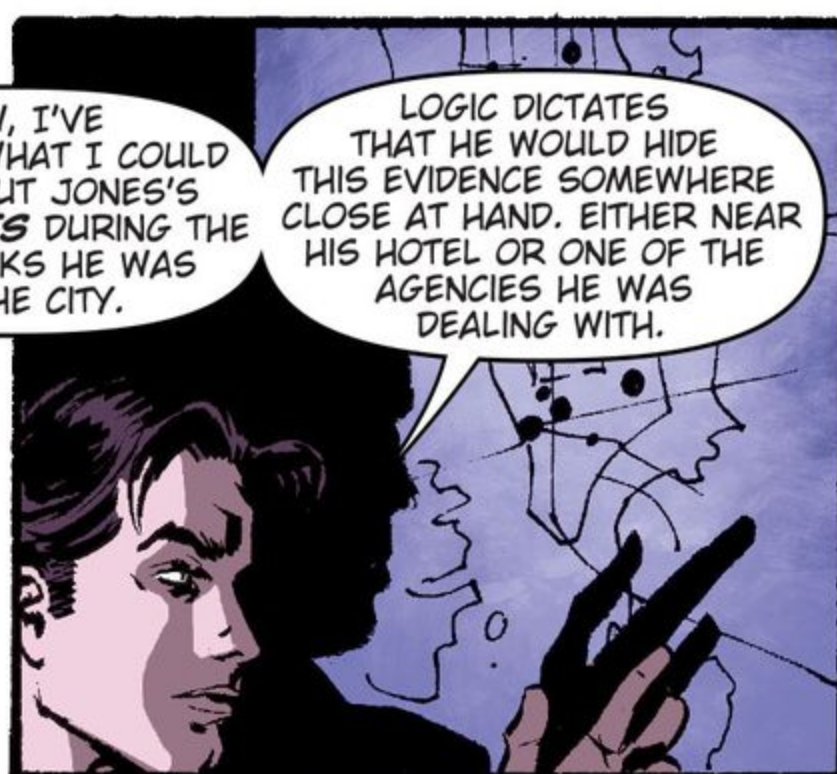


UNLESS HE NEVER WAS **OUR MOLE** TO BEGIN WITH.

WE NEVER HAD ANYTHING BUT CARUTHERS' **INSTINCT** ON THAT...AND YOU CAN SEE HOW WELL THOSE INSTINCTS SERVED **HIM**.







So here I am, searching the city in the dead of night for my own secret file. Lynch's file, that was supposed to be my ticket out...

...but looks like it'll be my ticket to Hell, instead. Unless I can find it before anyone else does.

And I've got Peter fucking Grimm looking over my shoulder the entire time.

OH, UH, HEY, GUYS...WE WRAPPIN' IT UP FOR NOW?

NOT JUST YET...

...BUT BEFORE WE GO, WOULD YOU **SCAN** CARVER FOR ME?

WHAT? WHAT THE FUCK IS THIS, GRIMM?

FOR ALL I KNOW, **YOU'RE** THE MOLE, CARVER, AND YOU COULD BE CARRYING OUT THE VERY THING WE'VE BEEN **LOOKING** FOR...

NOW, X-RAY MAN, DO AS YOU ARE FUCKING TOLD...

...UH, **SORRY**, HOLDEN...BUT, UH, HE'S THE **BOSS** N' ALL...

IT'S OKAY, RAY, GO AHEAD...

See, like I said, far too much irony.

Even if I find the file, I won't be able to sneak it out. Not with Triple X-Ray working with us like this, at Peter Grimm's command.

HE'S NOT CARRYING ANYTHING BUT HIS GUNS, SIR...

GOOD. THEN LET'S GET MOVING...

THIS IS POINTLESS, GRIMM. WE'RE NEVER GONNA FIND THIS THING, IF IT EVEN EXISTS...

THIS JONES ASSHOLE COULD'VE HIDDEN IT ANYWHERE.

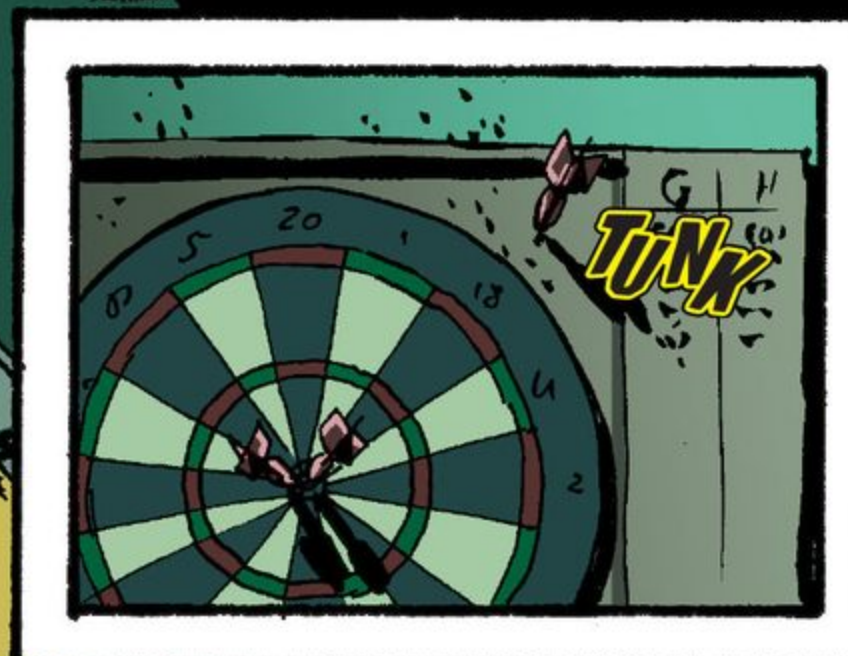
MAYBE, BUT I'VE NEVER SEEN TAO FAIL TO FIND WHAT HE WAS LOOKING FOR.

HAVE YOU?



And if I have any hope whatsoever of getting to that file before someone else does, it'll be down to Tao's deductive skills.







I KNOW YOU DIDN'T JUST DO THAT, GOGGLES...

I KNOW YOU DIDN'T JUST RUIN MY PERFECT GAME...

OH, MAN, HEY--

BECAUSE THAT WOULD BE REALLY STUPID...

AW, NOW WAIT A SEC'...I DIDN'T MEAN TO MESS YOU UP, MAN, I WAS JUST--

YAAA!

WAIT! WAIT!

FUCKING PIECE OF SHIT!

WAIT! WAIT--OWWW!



YOU ABOUT DONE
WATCHING THE MONKEYS
THROW THEIR *SHIT*,
HOLDEN?

BECAUSE IT'S
TIME TO GET TO
WORK...



HEY,
WHAT'RE
YOU DOING
HERE?

PLANS'VE
CHANGED.



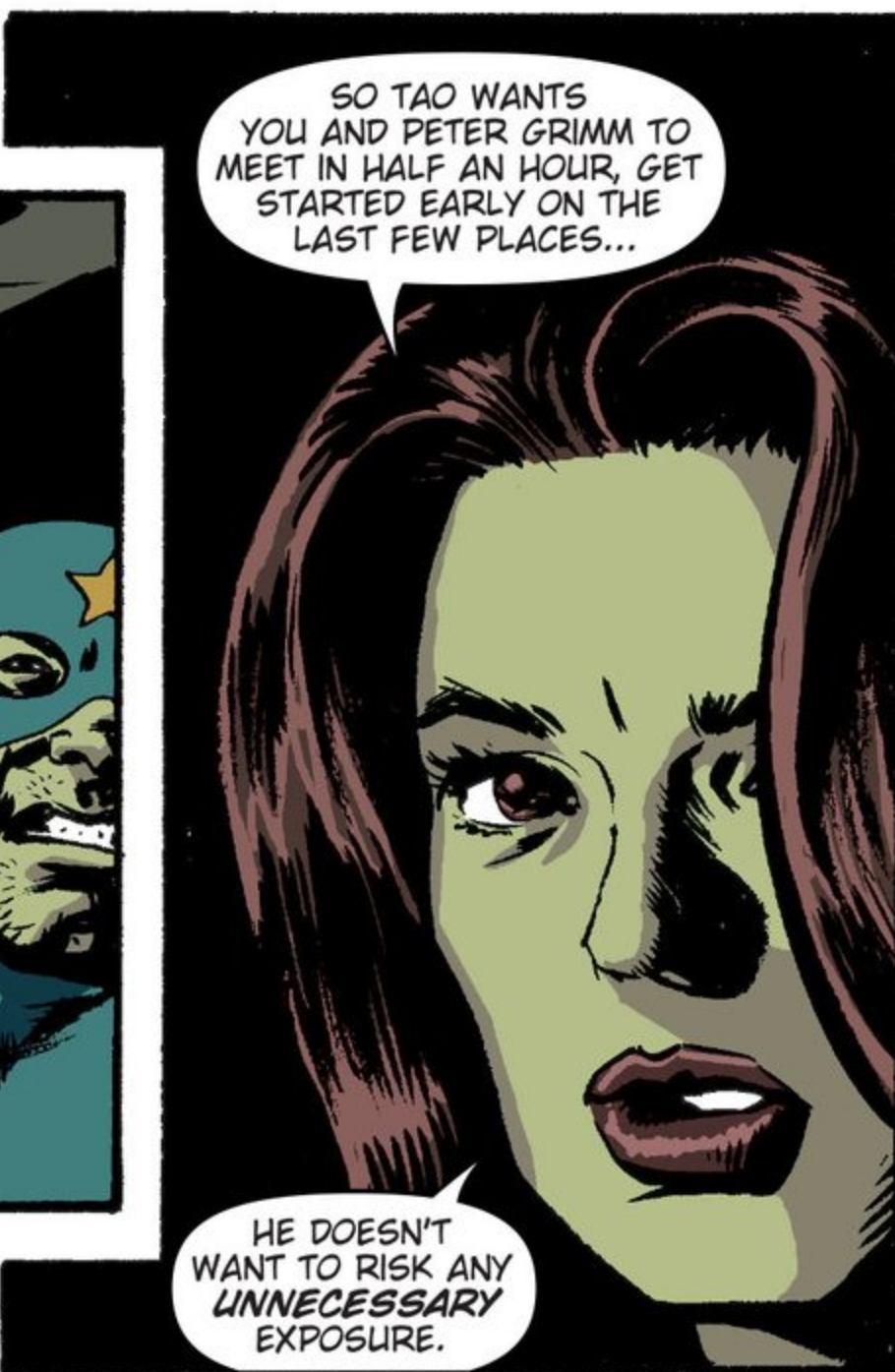
TAO JUST
GOT WORD THAT
THE OTHER SIDE HAVE
RAMPED UP THEIR
EFFORTS.

THEY'RE
BRINGING IN SOME *POST-
HUMAN* BACK-UP TO HELP
THEM SEARCH...



REALLY?
ANYONE I
KNOW?

PROBABLY JUST
TRAINEES AND NEW
RECRUITS, MISSION LIKE
THIS. BUT WE CAN'T
BE SURE.



SO TAO WANTS
YOU AND PETER GRIMM TO
MEET IN HALF AN HOUR, GET
STARTED EARLY ON THE
LAST FEW PLACES...

HE DOESN'T
WANT TO RISK ANY
UNNECESSARY
EXPOSURE.



Rules for choosing
dead drops that I
can remember--

Someplace no one
would ever bother
to look.

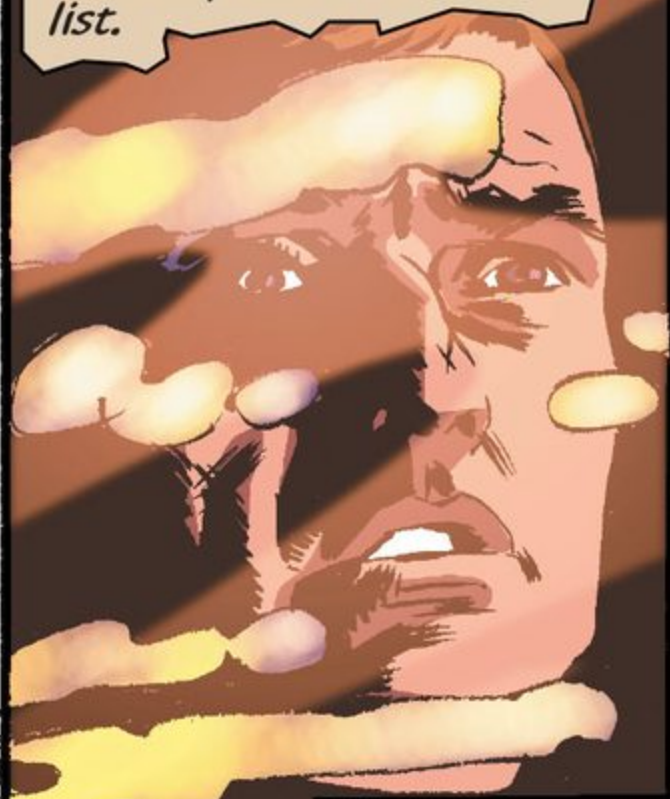
Someplace you
can easily access,
day or night.

Someplace close at
hand, in plain sight.



I'd been rolling those
three thoughts over in my
head since this mission
started...

Trying to visualize Jones
hiding my file in the
various places on Tao's
list.



I don't think Sir Malcolm
would have chosen anyplace
that was abandoned, because
you never knew when new
squatters would show up...



So tonight's first
location is actually a
pretty good guess.

It's close to the extraction
point he chose, and it's
under guard...

But not so much so
that you couldn't
slip past them.



Not that Peter
Grimm bothers
with that...



From what I've been able to pick up, Peter somehow has the ability to make people experience visceral horror just by touching them.

He leaves them stuck in a mental loop, living a nightmare over and over until they die from fear.

And that appears to be just one of his abilities. Whatever the other ones are, I don't want to know.

I'm just thankful he knows better than to ever touch me.

Yeah. This seems like just the place Jones would've picked. Little chance anything would change around here.

And more hiding places than you could imagine.

So then, where would the old bastard have stashed it?

Not deep in the bowels of this place, that's for sure. He wouldn't have wanted to be trolling through here too far to dig it out.

And he probably
would've avoided the
main entrance, too.

Okay, so somewhere
within reach from this
point...

Motherfucker.

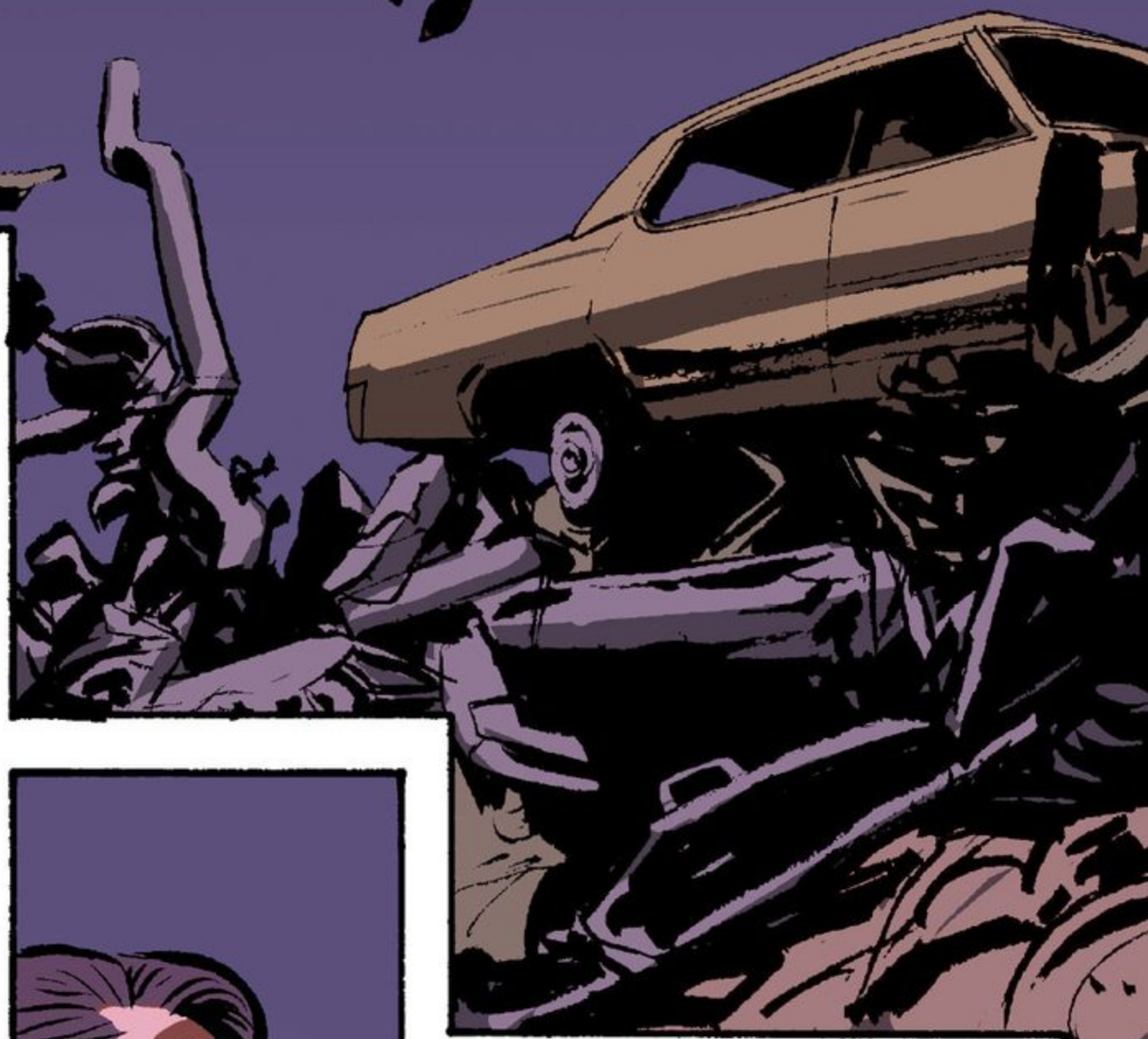
DANGER
HIGH
VOLTAGE
KEEP SECURE

CARVER!

GET TO
COVER!



Okay, who the fuck
is this dweeb?







I'll have to remember to buy Ray a drink later for causing such a perfect distraction...



Assuming Peter Grimm doesn't kill him first.



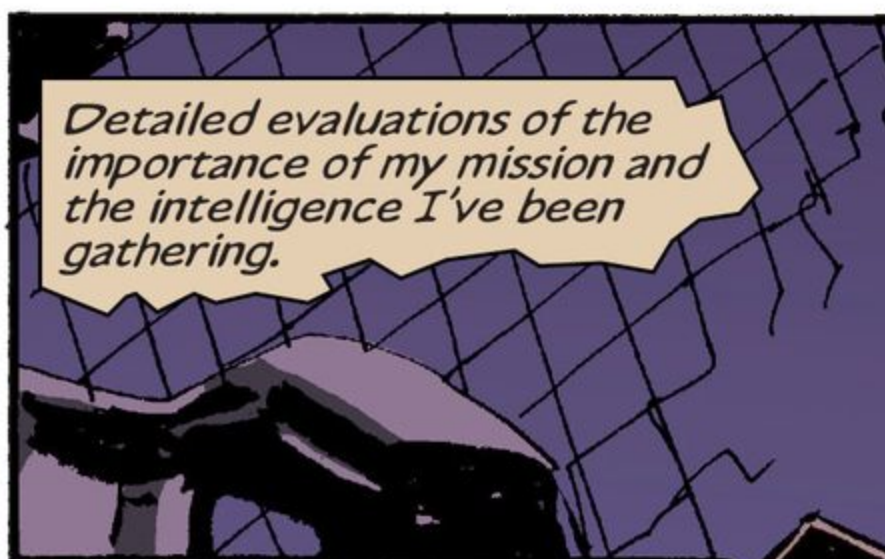


Son of a bitch...
This is it.



It's all here, every
report I ever gave...

Signed statements from
Lynch, clearing me of any
wrong-doing...



Detailed evaluations of the
importance of my mission and
the intelligence I've been
gathering.



Lynch. You fucking prick.
You told me there was no
record.



You wanted me to have no
hope, so I would be more
believable to Tao.

And now that it's here in my hands, this ticket to freedom...

...What can I do with it?

Who could I trust to help me?

God damn you, Lynch...

...You wanted me to have no hope. Looks like you get your wish.

GIVE IT UP, FOOL. MY STRENGTH IS TOO MUCH FOR YOU...

AND MY TRAINING IN TWELVE DIFFERENT STYLES OF MARTIAL--



...THERE'S NO REST FOR THE WICKED.